

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 23246

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: CHIRAC'S FUTURE AS PM AS REPORTED BY
VARIOUS PERSONALITIES

REF: PARIS 21978

SUMMARY: WELL KNOWN AND WELL CONNECTED JOURNALIST WITH
"LE POINT" BACK FROM VACATION HAD SUCCESSIVE CONVERSA-
TIONS IN LATE JULY AND EARLY AUGUST WITH: ROBERT
GALLEY, MINISTER OF EQUIPMENT; JEAN-PIERRE FOURCADE,
MINISTER OF FINANCE; MARIE-FRANCE GARAUD, POLITICAL
ADVISOR TO CHIRAC; YVES CANNAC, ASSISTANT SEC GEN
ELYSEE; OLIVIER GUICHARD, FORMER MINISTER AND UDR
BARON. WHILE THESE CONVERSATIONS GAVE OUR SOURCE NO
CLEARER IDEA OF CHIRAC'S FUTURE NOW THAN WHEN HE LEFT
FOR VACATION ONE MONTH AGO, THEY DID PRODUCE INTEREST-
ING INSIGHTS INTO THE POLITICAL ASSESSMENTS OF
IMPORTANT PERSONALITIES ON THE FRENCH SCENE. WE
SUMMARIZE HIS COMMENTS BELOW, WHICH IN GENERAL ACCORD
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WITH ANALYSES CONTAINED IN RECENT EMBASSY REPORTING

(PARIS 22635). END SUMMARY.

1. GALLEY TIPS HIS HAT TO CHIRAC.

(A) GALLEY VOLUNTEERED THAT CHIRAC HAS PROVEN HIS ABILITY TO KEEP UDR UNDER SOME CONTROL AND GENERALLY TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH PARLIAMENT.

(B) HE FELT THEREFORE THAT CHIRAC WAS STILL THE BEST PRIME MINISTER GISCARD COULD CHOOSE AT THIS TIME. GALLEY ADMITTED THAT HE WOULD NOT BE CHIRAC'S EQUAL IN DEALING WITH UDR NOR COULD HE SEE HIMSELF DOING BATTLE IN PARLIAMENT TO ASSURE THE PASSAGE OF CONTROVERSIAL BILLS. HE SAID THE SAME APPLIED TO SUCH MEN AS FOREIGN TRADE MINISTER RAYMOND BARRE, FREQUENTLY MENTIONED AS LIKELY SUCCESSOR TO CHIRAC.

(C) GALLEY ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT HE ADMIRES CHIRAC AS AN INTELLECTUAL OR POLITICIAN WITH VISION.

(COMMENT: WE DO NOT THINK THAT GALLEY IS UNDERESTIMATING HIS OWN INABILITY TO HANDLE PARLIAMENT, BUT HE HAS OTHER QUALITIES WHICH COULD STILL QUALIFY HIM FOR PM.)

2. FOURCADE SIDES WITH CHIRAC.

(A) FOURCADE DENIED THE RUMORS THAT HIS RELATIONS WITH THE PM HAD DETERIORATED, LET ALONE THAT HE IS CRITICAL OF CHIRAC. HE ADMITTED THAT AT TIMES HE FOUND HIMSELF IN DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PM ON TECHNICAL QUESTIONS BUT ON THE WHOLE HE FEELS THEY HAVE GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS.

(B) UNDER QUESTIONING, FOURCADE ADMITTED THAT CHIRAC'S ORIGINAL ATTITUDE ON THE CAPITAL GAINS TAX BILL AND HIS OBVIOUS EFFORT NOT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE DEBATE HAD ANNOYED HIM, BUT HE DEFERRED TO GISCARD TO TAKE CARE OF THE MATTER. HE FELT IN RETROSPECT THAT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PM'S ALOOFNESS WORKED TO FOURCADE'S ADVANTAGE SINCE IT GAVE HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIGHT FOR THE BILL SINGLE-HANDEDLY, WHICH WAS NOT ALL THAT BAD FOR HIS IMAGE.

(COMMENT: FOURCADE'S STATEMENTS STRIKE US SOMEWHAT DISINGENUOUS. HIS DIFFERENCES WITH CHIRAC HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY REPORTED TO BE ACRIMONIOUS AND NOT LIMITED TO TECHNICAL QUESTIONS.)

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3. MADAME GARAUD PLEADS IGNORANCE.

(A) MADAME GARAUD, ONE OF CHIRAC'S CLOSEST ADVISORS, APPEARED GENUINELY UNSURE OF HERSELF WITH REGARD TO THE GISCARD-CHIRAC RELATIONS. SHE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT CHIRAC HAD SUBMITTED A LETTER OF RESIGNATION (PARIS 21978), BUT COULD NOT GIVE ANY HARD EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF HER STATEMENT.

(B) SOURCE FOUND GARAUD'S STATEMENTS INTERESTING BECAUSE THEY SUGGEST THAT HER RELATIONS WITH THE PM ARE NOT ANY CLOSER THAN HIS RELATIONS WITH OTHER KEY STAFF MEMBERS IN MATIGNON. THIS IS NOT IN CONFLICT WITH THE REPORTS THAT CHIRAC DOES ALSO OPEN UP TO HIS SUBORDINATES, THEREBY INSPIRING DEVOTION ON THE PART OF MANY

OF THEM.

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4. CANNAC THROWS SOME LIGHT.

(A) CANNAC GAVE CHIRAC AS MUCH AS 99 PERCENT CHANCES OF STAYING ON AS PRIME MINISTER. HE CONFIRMED THAT THE ELYSEE DID GO THROUGH A PERIOD WHEN SERIOUS THOUGHT WAS BEING GIVEN TO IDENTIFYING AN ALTERNATIVE TO CHIRAC. HE DID NOT SPECIFY WHAT MADE HIM THINK THAT CHIRAC'S CHANCES OF SURVIVAL WERE AS HIGH AS HE INDICATED BUT IMPLIED THAT ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS WERE NOT SATISFACTORY.

(B) THE CHANGE IN OTHER GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES WILL BE ANNOUNCED BETWEEN 25 AUGUST AND 10 SEPTEMBER AND WILL BE ON A FAIRLY LARGE SCALE.

(C) THE APPOINTMENT OF JEAN FRANCOIS-PONCET AS SECRETARY GENERAL IN THE ELYSEE WILL HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE ELYSEE OPERATIONS AND THE GISCARD-CHIRAC RELATIONS. FIRST, THERE IS THE FACT THAT PONCET AND CHIRAC KNOW EACH OTHER WELL; EVEN THEIR WIVES ARE CLOSE FRIENDS. ACCORDINGLY, PONCET CAN BE COUNTED UPON TO MAKE SURE THERE IS COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CHIRAC AND GISCARD. HE COMMENTED THAT IN THE PAST THE GISCARD-CHIRAC MEETINGS DID NOT ALWAYS PRODUCE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF EACH OTHER'S VIEWS. THEY SEEMED TO TALK PAST EACH OTHER AND PIERRE BROSSOLETTE DID VERY LITTLE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION.

(D) PONCET, HOWEVER, BEING AN ACTIVIST WITH STRONGLY-HELD VIEWS THAT HE SHARES WITH THE PRESIDENT, MAY GO A BIT TOO FAR IN LETTING THE PM KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED OF HIM OR WHAT THE ELYSEE'S WISHES ARE. THEREFORE CHIRAC MAY FIND HIMSELF UNDER THE BURDEN OF TOO MUCH GUIDANCE RATHER THAN TOO LITTLE.

(COMMENT: CANNAC'S 99 PERCENT FOR CHIRAC'S STAYING ON AS PM SHOWS A DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE THAT NO ONE IN THE ELYSEE CAN RIGHTFULLY CLAIM. GISCARD IS KNOWN FOR NOT INFORMING EVEN HIS CLOSEST ADVISORS IN ADVANCE OF HIS DECISIONS AND FOR HAVING A PREDILECTION FOR ACTIONS THAT NO ONE HAD EXPECTED OR ANTICIPATED. AT THE MOST

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THEREFORE CANNAC'S STATEMENT REFLECTS THE PREVAILING VIEW AS ALREADY REPORTED BY THE EMBASSY TO THE EFFECT THAT CHIRAC HAS A BETTER THAN EVEN CHANCE OF STAYING ON.)

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5. GUICHARD GOES TO THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM.

(A) GUICHARD SPOKE OF HIS CALL ON GISCARD EARLY IN JULY AND SAID THAT HIS PURPOSE WAS TO ASK THE PRESIDENT TWO QUESTIONS: WAS HE REALLY INTERESTED IN WINNING THE 1978 ELECTIONS, AND DID HE KNOW THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS THE WORST GOVERNMENT OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC? ACCORDING TO GUICHARD, GISCARD SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT REPLY TO THE FIRST QUESTION, BUT YES, HE WAS AWARE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS BAD.

(B) SOURCE DECIDED TO BE JUST AS BLUNT WITH CANNAC AND ASKED HIM THE SAME QUESTION ABOUT GISCARD'S REAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE 1978 ELECTIONS. CANNAC GAVE A QUALIFIED ANSWER BY SAYING THAT GISCARD LIKES TO GOVERN AND OBVIOUSLY HE CAN DO SO BETTER WITH A MAJORITY GOVERNMENT THAN WITH AN OPPOSITION GOVERNMENT. CONFIDENTIAL

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ACCORDINGLY, HE INTENDS TO TAKE A LEADING ROLE IN THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN, BUT HE WILL STILL KEEP IN RESERVE THE STRATEGY OF A GOVERNMENT WITH THE OPPOSITION. CANNAC ALSO IMPLIED THAT INDEED IT WAS POSSIBLE TO WAGE A CAMPAIGN FOR VICTORY BY THE MAJORITY AND STILL KEEP OPEN THE OPTION OF ACCOMMODATION WITH THE OPPOSITION IN THE GOVERNMENT.

6. COMMENT: THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POINT IN THE FOREGOING IS UNDOUBTEDLY GUICHARD'S ALLEGATION THAT VGE DID NOT ANSWER HIS QUESTION WITH REGARD TO 1978. THE FACT THAT GUICHARD FELT ABLE TO PUT THE QUESTION DIRECTLY TO THE PRESIDENT REINFORCES THE VIEW IN SOME UDR CIRCLES THAT GISCARD'S ANTIPATHY TOWARDS THE UDR IS STRONG ENOUGH TO PERMIT HIM TO FOLLOW A STRATEGY OF ACCOMMODATION WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN ORDER TO CUT UDR STRENGTH AND INFLUENCE. ON THIS SCORE, CANNAC PROBABLY GAVE THE RIGHT EXPLANATION OF GISCARD'S POSITION AND TACTICS. GAMMON

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